

The Joyful Statutes of the Lord

Week 6

Scripture: Deuteronomy 12:1 - 16:17

Sermon Series: Deuteronomy: The Final Words of Moses

Topic: Law, Joy

I. Introduction

We are in week 6 of our overview of *Deuteronomy: The Final Words of Moses*. This morning will cover chapters 12 through the first half of 16.

We are in the middle of Moses' second speech (4:44 - 26:19) and in this section Moses speaks of "*the Joyful Statutes of the LORD*."



II. The Joyful Statutes of the LORD

Moses now delineates the law by listing specific statutes, or commands, of the LORD.¹

"These are the statutes and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth." Deuteronomy 12:1 (ESV)

What do you believe about God? When you mentally begin to list God's attributes, is *joyful* at the top of the list? Or at the bottom? Or does it fail to even make the list?

What do you believe about the commands of the Lord? Are they heavy burdens intended to keep you from having fun? Or are they the good guardrails intended to keep you on the road to eternal joy?

¹ When the name LORD is used in all caps by biblical translators, this indicates that the personal name of God YHWH (Yahweh), is being translated.

That Moses in his final days would remind God's people of God's commands is not surprising, but what is surprising is that he would do so by weaving through his speech threads of joy that bind up all these commands together. Yes, the LORD commands obedience to his commands, but he does so in order to bring joy to his people! That's is the theme with which Moses both begins (12:5, 7) and ends (16:11) this section of Scripture. He does so by,

- 1) Speaking of the joyful place of worship (chap. 12),
- 2) Warning against potential threats to joyful worship (chap. 13)
- 3) Speaking of joyful food and joyful tithing (chap. 14)
- 4) Speaking of the joy of release (chap. 15) and,
- 5) Speaks of three joyful feasts (chap. 16)

A. The One Place of Joyful Worship (12)

As Moses begins to list the specific statutes of the Lord, the first instruction he gives is,

² You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. ³ You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. Deuteronomy 12:2-3 (ESV)

Israel was to "not worship the LORD your God in that way" (12:4). The God of Israel was not to be worship at any just any place, but rather at only one particular place.

⁵ You shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, ⁶ and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. ⁷ And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall **rejoice**, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. Deuteronomy 12:5-7 (ESV)

You shall seek the place (v.5). Moses is commanding Israel to worship God only at one place. Whereas the nations whom God was dispossessing worshiped their gods at many different places, Israel was to be different. They were to worship God at only one place, at "**THE place.**"

The LORD your God will choose (v.5). This was not to be a place that they would chose, but rather the place of worship would be a place that God would choose. The LORD would

choose a place “*out of all your tribes*” (v.5). The fact that God would be the one to “choose” this places is repeated by Moses 14 times in this section!²

To put his name and make his habitation there (v.5). This particular place would be marked by two characteristics. First, God would cause his *name* to be there and second, his *habitation* would be there. This singular place would be attached to God’s personal name, which is Yahweh. This place would also be uniquely known as Yahweh’s ‘habitation,’ or his ‘dwelling’ place. Just as the Lord’s presence had uniquely been with the people of Israel at the tabernacle throughout the wilderness wandering, so will his presence be with them in the future at that place where he would chose to cause his name to dwell. This place eventually was revealed to king David to be Jerusalem. Thus, when Solomon completed the construction of the temple, then this became the religious center of Israelite worship.

There you shall eat before the LORD your God (v.7). At this place, and this place alone, the people were to worship God. “*There*,” in that unique place that God would choose, and there alone the people were to burn their sacrifices, give their offerings, bring their tithes, and pay their vows. These acts of worship always included “*eating before the Lord*.” They were both worshiping “before the Lord,” that is they were with him in his presence and this was done over a meal. You’ll recall that all of Israel’s pilgrimage festivals were feasts!³ God wanted to eat with his people. He invited his people to share a meal in his presence.

You shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake (v.7). As the people gathered “*before the LORD*,” and ate food in his presence, they were to *rejoice*! All of them, *You* and everyone in the *household*, including “*sons and daughters, male servants and females servants*” (v.12, 18). Gathering in corporate worship, before the presence of the Lord, with all the people of God, was to be a joyful experience. That same joy in the Lord was to be present “*in all that you undertake*.” The joy of the Lord was to be present in corporate worship, but not limited to corporate worship.

In which the LORD your God has blessed you (v.7). This joy will come as a result of the blessing of the Lord.

Summary

Upon entrance into the land, they were to destroy all places and idols attached to pagan worship. They were seek the one place where God would chose for them to worship. That one place would be a place identified by Yahweh’s name and presence. And there alone they were to worship him and with in his presence they were all to feast in joy!

² Deuteronomy 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16.

³ The Feast of Passover & Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks (i.e. Pentecost), and Feast of Booths.

B. Four Threats to Joyful Worship (13)

In this second section, which actually begins at the end of chapter 12 (vs. 29-32), Moses warns against *three threats to joyful worship*. He instructs the people against allowing anything or anyone to steal their joy in God by pulling their hearts away from the LORD by inviting them into idolatry. Moses warns against four potential threats, curiosity, prophets, family, and a city of unbelievers.

1. Let no unholy curiosity or theological controversy steal your joy (v.30-31).

Moses warns them against any kind of curiosity to discover how the wicked nations worshiped their false gods. He says to them, after you enter the land, “*...do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?’*” (v.30). Oh how many doors to habitual sins have been opened by the simple curiosity. Do not seek to discover the means of sin or the methods of wicked worship by being curious. Moses says to them, “*You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way...*” (v.31). Do not allow your curiously to lead you into sin and away from the Lord, who is the only source of lasting joy.

AND in the final sentence of chapter 12, Moses says to us, *Do not allow controversial theological questions to keep you from joy in the Lord*. Sometimes people stumble over hard truths in Scripture. For example, many stumble over the fact that God commanded the total destruction of the Canaanites and Amorites living in the Promised Land. There are many just reasons for why God did that but Moses here highlights the single most significant reason, which is that they barbecued their babies.

...for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

Deuteronomy 12:31 (ESV)

Any group of people who sacrifices their own children in worship of false gods deserves to be destroyed from their land. This includes the United States since we sacrifice about 3,000 of our unborn children every single day to false god of personal autonomy.

2. Let no prophet steal your joy (13:1-5).

Moses explains that there will be those who call themselves prophets (or dreamers) who will arise and will actually do signs and wonders (things that actually “*come to pass*” v.2), but then they will go on to invite you to serve another god. These prophets will have power—real power, but they will use that power to persuade people to abandon the one true God. Moses explains that God will allow this to happen as a *test*, to see whether or not you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul (v.3). Moses commands them that when this happens, they are to “*put him to death, because*

he taught rebellion" (v.5). Moses admonished them not to allow a prophet to steal their joy in the LORD their God.

3. Let no family or friend steal your joy (13:6-12).

Moses also warns against allowing any friend, family member, child, or even a spouse to secretly lure them away from loving the LORD their God above all. Anyone who does this Moses says, "*You shall kill him*" (v.9). He commands them not to listen to them, not to yield to them, not to spare them, nor to conceal them. They were to "*stone them with stones*" (v.10). Idolatry was not to be tolerated among the people of Israel.

4. Let no city steal your joy (13:12-18).

Finally, Moses also warns against allowing even a whole city of idolatrous apostates to remain alive. If they hear of a whole city of Israelites that abandons God in order to worship false gods or idols, then Moses commands them to "*inquire and search diligently... to be certain that this is true*" (v.14) and if they discover that it is true, then they were to destroy the whole city, all the people, all the cattle, and all the stuff of city. They were to gather it all into the city square, burn everything, and then cast upon it a heap of stones that would be a perpetual testimony against that city and it was never again to be rebuilt.

Summary

Israel was not to lose their joy in God because of curiosity about pagan idolatry, powerful prophets who performed miracles, ungodly friends and family, or even whole cities of people. They were not to allow anything or anyone to move them away from devotion to the LORD their God.

C. Eat Joyfully (14:1-21)

Moses instructs Israel in how to eat joyfully to the Lord. Because Israel now belongs to God as his own personal people, this fact is to be remembered even in the food they eat. Before giving instructions on what food to eat, Moses reminds them of God's unique love for them.

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." Deuteronomy 14:2 (ESV)

Calling them 'holy' here certainly does not mean sinless, but rather separate, and set apart as the unique "*treasured possession*" of the Lord. Because they were God's people, every aspect of their lives was to be shaped by that relationship, including what they ate.

Moses' command on what kinds of food they were to eat or not eat (vs.3-21) essentially hangs upon a distinction between life and death. Israel was not to eat any animal that fed

off dead animals. They were only to eat animals that ate plants. No scavenger birds were to be eaten, but they were allowed to eat deer, sheep, goats, etc. God is a God of life, not death, and therefore his people were to stay away from anything that mixed life and death.⁴ This is most likely the reason for the prohibition,

“You shall not boil a young goat
in its mother’s milk.”

Deuteronomy 14:21 (ESV)

A mother’s milk is a source of life for her young, therefore it would be a perverse inversion of creation order to make milk an instrument of death.

Summary

The joy here comes from the fact that the LORD God of the universe has chosen Israel to be his own treasured possession. He loved them with a special love out of all the people on earth. This fact he does not want them to forget and so as often as they eat they were to be thinking of their God as their source of life!

D. Tithe Joyfully (14:22-29)

The last half of chapter 14 involves instruction regarding tithing, which is giving 10 percent⁵ of all their crops to the LORD. Every year they were to travel to the chosen place of worship and give their tithe joyfully to the Lord. Moses says,

²⁴ And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, when the LORD your God blesses you, because the place is too far from you, which the LORD your God chooses, to set his name there, ²⁵ then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the LORD your God chooses ²⁶ and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and *rejoice*, you and your household.

Deuteronomy 14:24-26 (ESV)

So if the place of worship is too far to carry 10 percent of all the crops, then it could be sold locally and then the money taken with the family as they traveled to the place of worship and then after arriving buy there “*whatever they desired*” and then the family would worship the Lord together “*eating before the LORD*” and *rejoicing* with their whole household. In this agrarian society, tithing was quite different than we think of it. But they were to tithe with joy in the presence of the Lord. This took place each year for two years,

⁴ If this is the correct theme running through this whole chapter, then this may explain why the chapter opens with a prohibition of cutting one’s self for the dead. Excessive cutting could lead to death, and one ought not mourn to the point of death on behalf of the dead. The body is the dwelling place of life and ought not to be abused.

⁵ Genesis 14:20.

but then in the third year, they would not travel, but rather would remain in their hometown and give the tithe to the Levites, widows, orphans, and sojourners (i.e. strangers) so that they too could rejoice in the Lord and “**eat and be filled**” (14:29).

E. Release Joyfully (15)

In chapter 15 Moses teaches joyful statutes intended to prevent perpetual slavery.

“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release.”

Deuteronomy 15:1 (ESV)

There were two kinds of release:

1. Every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor (v.2).
2. Every indentured servant (i.e. contract laborer) shall be released.

Every seven years there's to be a kind of financial and contractual reset that granted release and relief for all people. Moses commands the people to be generous to one another even in the years closer to the seventh year and not to fail to be generous to a poor brother or sister, even though the year of release was coming soon. He tells them that they should always be generous to the needy for the Lord will so bless them that they could be generous, even when the year of release is coming. He tells them to “**remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt**” (15:15). Therefore, since the Lord had blessed them by releasing them from slavery and been generous to them in supplying all their needs, then they too should release one another and bless and be generous toward one another. If their trust was in the LORD their God, then they can release joyfully.

F. Feast Joyfully (16:1-17)

Finally, in chapter 16 Moses gives instruction regarding the three annual pilgrimage feasts which they were to go to the chosen place of worship and feast in joy before the Lord. All three of these holy ceremonies are joyful feasts before the Lord. They are like communing at table with the Lord.

1. Feast of Passover (vs.1-8)

Offered “*at the place that the LORD will choose to make his name dwell there*” (v.2), and not in just any town (v.5). This feast marks the day of deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt when they were joyfully freed to worship the Lord! That deliverance came at the price of the life of the firstborn in all the land of Egypt. The death of the firstborn purchased their freedom and they were never to forget this.

2. Feast of Weeks (vs.9-12)

This feast is to take place seven weeks after the grain harvest begins. It was a joyful celebration of thanks to God who gave them abundant food.

Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering... as the LORD your God blesses you. ¹¹ And you shall **rejoice** before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, you male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there.

Deuteronomy 16:10-11 (ESV)

3. Feast of Booths (vs.13-17)

The third feast mentioned commemorated God's provision for them throughout the forty years of wandering in the desert.

¹⁴ You shall **rejoice** in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns. ¹⁵ For seven days you shall keep the feast to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether **joyful**.

Deuteronomy 16:14-15 (ESV)

This was to be a weeklong feast that was "altogether joyful" because God had blessed them and provided produce and blessed their work. The point of the feast was joyful thanksgiving to God for all that he had done for them.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, let's answer the question, So what? These were very different days so what do they have to do with us? Jesus said, "**Moses wrote about me**" (Jn 5:46). So is Moses in any way talking about Jesus in these 5 chapters?

A. From Moses to Jesus

Jesus claimed that Moses wrote about him. If that's true, then can we see Jesus in any of these chapters.

1. **One place of worship points to one Son/Savior.** Chapter 12 is about the one location of worship that God would choose to make his name dwell and cause his presence to be. God's command through Moses to destroy the various places of pagan worship results from the pagan belief that there are many gods of many places. There are the gods of the mountains, gods of the forest, gods of the plains, and gods of the sea. This is wrong. There is only one God and therefore there is only one way to worship him and that is through the way he commands. There are not many ways to God.

There is only one way to God and Jesus claims to be that only way.⁶ Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my father also.*" (Jn 14:6-7). The one place of worship that Moses spoke of points to the one person through whom God chose to reveal himself to the world and that person is Jesus. About Jesus, at his baptism, God audible spoke from heaven saying, "*This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased*" (Mt 3:17) and then he anointed him with the Holy Spirit who descend upon him like a dove.

2. ***Let no one steal your joy in Jesus.*** Chapter 13 is about persons who can potentially draw you away from the love of God. Moses tells the people not to allow miracle working prophets, friends, or family to draw them away. God is to be loved above all others. Jesus says the same, "*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*" (Mt 10:37). The faithful Christian cannot love anyone or anything more than he or she loves Jesus.
3. ***Jesus is better than food or money.*** Chapter 14 is about food and tithing. The point of that chapter is that a relationship with God affects every area of life, including what you eat and what you do with your money. Jesus clarified a misunderstanding. Moral righteousness is not determined by what kinds of food one might or might not eat. Sin does not come from eating the wrong food and righteousness does not come from eating the right food. Sin comes from corruption in the heart of a person. So Jesus "*declared all foods clean*" (Mk 7:19). And Jesus also declared, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35). Through Jesus we can joyfully eat whatever you want and joyfully give whatever amount you want.
4. ***Jesus can set you free.*** Chapter 15 is about the joy of being released. It is about being a people so joyful in the Lord that one can willingly and joyfully release your servants and those indebted to you. This points us the reality that true freedom comes only through Jesus. He said, "*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (Jn 8:31-32). Those who are truly the disciples of Jesus will abide in, remain in, walk in his word and then the result will be freedom. The words of Jesus have the power to grant freedom to soul.
5. ***Through Jesus we can feast with the Father.*** Jesus Chapter 16 is about the three pilgrimage feasts.
 1. Passover points to Jesus because in it we see that Jesus is our Passover lamb who was sacrificed to save us from death (1 Cor 5:7).
 2. The Feast of Weeks is the harvest feast or Pentecost and in it we see through Jesus the Holy Spirit is poured out in our hearts (Acts 2).

⁶ See also Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5.

3. The Feast of Booths represents the wilderness wandering when they lived in tents, and yet throughout that whole time God was with them dwelling in their midst in the form of cloud and fire over the tabernacle. When Jesus was incarnated John says, "*The Word became flesh and dwelt (i.e. tabernacled) among us...*" (Jn 1:14).

The fact that all of these are feasts tells us that God want you at the table with him. Jesus then offered his body and blood in order to purchase your seat at the table, if you will accept it.

B. Application for you and me

Here are three things every Christian must believe.

1. ***God is a joyful God.*** David sings, "*In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures for evermore*" (Ps 16:11) and "*You make me glad with the joy of your presence*" (Ps 21:6) and from his hand is poured out "*the oil of gladness*" (Ps 45:7).

Since this is true, don't you want to be as near to him as possible?

2. ***His commands are good guardrails on the road to eternal joy.*** God is good and all his ways are good. Therefore, we must be convinced that his commands are also intended for our good. No one will obey a single command of God unless you believe that command is good for you. *God, in all his commands, is not trying to kill our joy but rather to cause us to share in his own eternal joy!* As Jesus will one day say to his obedient servants, "*Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master*" (Mt 25:21, 23).

Since this true, don't you want to obey him?

3. ***Jesus came to give God's joy to anyone who will believe in him.*** He said, "*I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly*" (Jn 10:10). And again he said, "*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full*" (Jn 15:11).

Since this true, don't you want to be full of the joy of Jesus?

IV. Discussion Questions

1. When you think about God, do you think of him as joyful? Why or why not?
2. What do Moses words reveal about God?
3. How do you think most people would describe the purpose of God's commands? Did the message in any way change how you think of God's commands? If so, describe how.
4. Why do you think that, in contrast to all the false gods of the nations (that were worshiped at many different places), God commanded that he only be worship at one place?
5. What threats to joyful worship did Moses warn against in chapter 13? What do you think is the most significant threat to joyful worship today? Explain your answer.
6. Do you think God cares about what you eat? Why or why not?
7. What is the significance of the fact that all the pilgrimage festivals were feasts? How does this relate to joyful worship?
8. Where do you see Jesus in these chapters in Deuteronomy?
9. What is one thing you do not want to forget from these chapters?
10. How are you to respond to this message?